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NEWSPAPER

Alcohol sales rise 5% in restaurants

Bar Management magazine

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...N.Y. Metro Report/Page 40

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The Weekly Newspaper of the Food-Service Industry

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Chefs Mark Militello, right, and Charles Saunders.

Haute cuisine pioneers take Florida to the Max

By Joe Edwards

POMPANO BEACH, Fla. — Restaurateur Dennis Max and executive chef Mark Militello have taken South Florida by storm, turning on customers to New American and Tuscan food at their three restaurants and attracting national attention to Sunshine State cuisine.

Cafe Max in Pompano Beach, Max's Place in North Miami, and Maxaluna Tuscan Grill in Boca Raton are grossing more than $7 million a year, offering dishes prepared with fresh, sometimes unusual, and often locally produced seafood,

(See MAX, page 54)

NRA foresees rosy '88, disputes recession fears

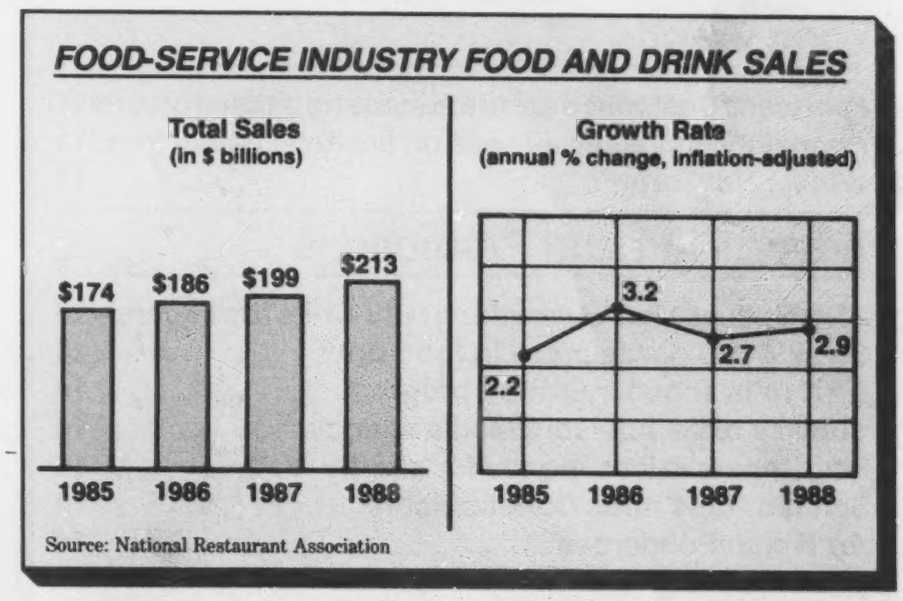
By Don Jeffrey

NEW YORK — The National Restaurant Association, unfazed by the stock-market collapse and predictions of a consumer-spending slowdown, has unveiled an optimistic economic forecast for the industry in 1988.

The trade organization projected that sales in the nation's restaurants, bars, and contract and institutional feeders would rise 7.1 percent, to $213.5 billion, in 1988.

With inflation factored out, industry-wide real sales growth would be 2.9 percent, compared with a projected 2.7 percent this year and an estimated 3.2 percent in 1986.

And, according to NRA calculations, fast feeders should outperform other eating places in sales gains. The NRA is the nation's leading trade group for the food-service industry, and its economic data are generally held to be the most authoritative.



"The news is good; in fact, it is breathtaking," NRA president Michael Grisanti said at a press conference in New York this month.

But the news could turn bad.

Many economists are warning that consumer and business spending could slow in the aftermath of the stock-market crash, sparking a recession. They fret about a declining dollar and the nation's expansive budget and trade deficits.

Grisanti cited research showing that consumer confidence had "dipped only slightly" since the stock-market collapse on Oct. 19. But, noting

(See NRA, page 54)

7-Eleven freezes fast-food plan

Stock-market crash clouds Southland buyout

By Peter J. Romeo

DALLAS — 7-Eleven, the convenience-store giant whose rapid move into fast feeding sent tremors through the restaurant industry, is halting installation of food-service equipment until a leveraged buyout of its parent is completed.

Jere Thompson

The retail chain has also shelved tests of fast-food joint ventures with Hardee's and Church's and has aborted attempts to strike a similar arrangement with Rocky Rococo.

However, 7-Eleven has not terminated its search for ways to sell through its 8,200 units the products of nationally known food-service chains.

The chain is hammering out an arrangement to stock Dunkin' Donuts' signature pastries. The convenience-store chain is already testing such a venture with Winchell's Donuts.

The retailer's operators, the Thompson family of Dallas, have agreed to buy 7-Eleven parent Southland Corp., for $4.9 billion.

The stock market crash prompted Joe, Jere, and

(See 7-ELEVEN, page 4)

Minneapolis: Fine-dining battleground

By Carolyn Walkup

MINNEAPOLIS — Operators of new upscale urban restaurants here have set out to upgrade fine-dining standards in a tough, price-sensitive market.

The operators of D'Amico Cucina, Goodfellow's, and Tejas believe the time and place are right for their concepts.

Downtown Minneapolis is booming with retail and office development.

Per-capita income is high—$16,799 in Hennepin County in 1984, the last year for which statistics are available. And unemployment is low—3.9 percent.

"I think there are enough people here to support it," Richard D'Amico said of his D'Amico Cucina, an elegant contemporary Italian restaurant he and his brother Larry hope will equal other highly regarded

(See MINNEAPOLIS, page 4)

FOOD WATCH

Trifling with tradition

Restaurateurs who keep their doors open on Thanksgiving know better than to trifle with the turkey tradition. But in recent years some intrepid operators seem to have been touched by the pioneering spirit when hunting for alternate selections for their turkey day menus.

For example, chef Bradley Ogden of Campton Place in San Francisco is offering a limited Thanksgiving menu that includes grilled breast of pheasant with American foie gras; potato galette, which resembles a potato pancake; and braised red Swiss chard.

A bit farther south in Monterey, Calif., Hammerheads is featuring wild goose and Cornish game hens stuffed with quail.

In New York native American restaurant Silverbird plans to serve grilled venison, while the Italian trattoria Sandro's is featuring crisp suckling pig and braised goose.

Ocean Avenue Seafood, the hot, new restaurant in Santa Monica, Calif., is offering swordfish in chili-lime butter as well as poached salmon with oysters in fresh basil cream.

And for those who want turkey—but with a twist—Abacus, a Los Angeles Chinese seafood restaurant, will serve a tea-smoked turkey.

—Paul Frumkin

ACADEMY LEADS NRN FINE DINING HALL OF FAME SELECTIONS — Page 2

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NEWS DIGEST

Anwar Soliman drops bid for Restaurant Associates

NEW YORK — Anwar Soliman, the Newport Beach, Calif.-based restaurant chain executive, has withdrawn his $17-per-share bid for Restaurant Associates Industries here. No explanation was given.

The retreat appeared to clear the way for RA executives to complete their $14.25 bid for the company, owner of such well-known restaurants as Mamma Leone's and Acapulco.

It marked the second round that RA insiders won. Earlier, Soliman withdrew a $19 bid, letting stand a $17 offer from management. After the October stock-market crash, management reduced the proposal to $14.25 for the 5.6 million shares outstanding.

Sogni Dorati, Melvin's Cafe close suddenly in Chicago

CHICAGO — Two well-known Near North Side restaurants, Sogni Dorati and Melvin's Cafe, have closed.

Sogni Dorati's chef-owner Silvio Pinto and family closed their six-year-old Italian fine-dining restaurant because of financial problems, Pinto said.

Owners of Melvin's Cafe would not comment on reasons for shutting down the casual restaurant and bar that was most noted for its outdoor cafe in the heart of the Rush Street entertainment district. One Rush Street observer surmised that Melvin's "died in the winter," and its owners may not have wanted to endure another one.

Taco Cabana faces fine after immigration raid

SAN ANTONIO, Texas — Immigration officials were reportedly considering fines against Taco Cabana Inc. following a raid on six outlets that picked up 23 illegal aliens.

A U.S. Immigration and Naturalization official conceded, however, that the company had attempted to comply with the stiff, new law.

Taco Cabana, a fledgling Mexican fast-food chain, recently joined with dinner house operator Chili's Inc. of Dallas in a joint development venture.

Riese adds KFC, Nathan's to its NY franchise fold

NEW YORK — The Riese Organization has signed franchise agreements to open 25 Kentucky Fried Chicken outlets and 23 Nathan's Famous units in Manhattan over the next five years.

KFC already owns and franchises 150 fast-food restaurants in the area; Nathan's operates 19 fast-food units here.

It was initially unclear whether or not Riese would continue as a Church's Fried Chicken franchisee.

Riese also operates more than 200 other restaurants—most of them franchised units of national chains, including Pizza Hut, Houlihan's, Roy Rogers, and Del Taco.

Index up 1.8 points

1.8

NEW YORK — In its second consecutive weekly advance, the *Nation's Restaurant News* Stock Index rose 1.8 points in the period ended Nov. 13, closing at 152.8.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average of blue-chip stocks fell 24.04 points in the week, to 1,935.01. Analysts attributed the decline in part to Washington's lack of progress in trimming the nation's budget deficit.

Ark Restaurants, operator of full-service New York dining establishments, led all restaurant companies in volume surge as 90,500 shares were traded, 135 percent above average. Consolidated Products, operator of the Steak 'n' Shake chain, was the leading percentage-price gainer, rising 88 cents, or 24 percent, to $4.50. G.D. Ritzy's was the biggest relative decliner, losing 19 cents, or 25 percent, to 56 cents.

More financial news, pages 52-53

Robert Rosellini to reopen The Other Place next month

SEATTLE — Robert Rosellini said he would reopen The Other Place, his restaurant here, early next month in a condominium complex adjoining the Pike Place Market.

The Other Place, operating in a 50-story bank building, had served as a showcase for Northwest foodstuffs for 13 years before Rosellini closed it at the beginning of 1987 to prepare for the move to new quarters.

Wellington leaving Aurora for Stillman's NY group

NEW YORK — Ray Wellington, managing director of Joe Baum's Aurora here, will be leaving the two-year-old restaurant early next year to work with Alan Stillman's New York Restaurant Group.

Wellington will step in as director of wine for the Manhattan Ocean Club, Smith & Wollensky, and the Post House.

Cadillac Bar sues Chevys over alleged copycatting

SAN FRANCISCO — The owners of the Cadillac Bar here allege in a lawsuit that several key components of their five-year-old concept have been copied by the year-old Chevys Mexican chain.

Cadillac Bar attorneys filed a so-called trade dress infringement suit against three-unit Chevys in U.S. District Court. In it they asked the court to bar Chevys from using design and menu elements that could lead the public to believe the two concepts are related.

Attorneys for Chevys said the suit is "without merit" and have asked the court to dismiss it.

Compiled from staff and news reports

Academy leads Hall of Fame voting

NEW YORK — A distinguished academy of 80 *Nation's Restaurant News* Fine Dining Hall of Fame members will be leading the selection of the winners for 1988.

Last year's inductees, for example, were Anthony's restaurant in St. Louis; Arcadia in New York; Chez Panisse in Berkeley, Calif.; Jean-Louis at Watergate in Washington; Morton's in Chicago; The Old Original Bookbinder's in Philadelphia; Routh Street Cafe in Dallas; Sammy's in Cleveland; Season's at the Bostonian Hotel in Boston; and Trumps in West Hollywood, Calif.

Hall of Fame '88

Ballots are being readied to be mailed to all the previous winners.

This marks the ninth year that *Nation's Restaurant News*, the weekly newspaper of the food-service industry, is sponsoring a program honoring excellence in fine-dining restaurants.

The Fine Dining Hall of Fame awards are presented annually to the owner or owners of restaurants for embodying the highest standards in food preparation, table service, consistency of operation, employee training and motivation and for enhancing the fine-dining experience in general.

The 1988 award winners will be featured in *Food Trends in Fine Dining*, a special magazine that will be published by *Nation's Restaurant News* May 9, 1988.

In addition, the 1988 award winners will be honored along with the previous inductees at a Champagne luncheon in Chicago next May during the National Restaurant Association show.

7-Eleven slows fast-food push

(Continued from page 1)
Joe ("Jodie") Thompson, Southland's chairman, chief executive, and director, respectively, to postpone an offering of junk bonds that was to fund the acquisition.

The setback for long-term financing came after the Thompsons had already laid out $2.4 billion in borrowed funds to buy the 31.5 million shares, or 60 percent, of the company they did not already own.

Because of the LBO, a spokesman said, the Thompsons are too pressed financially to equip more units with The Works Condiments Bar, which 7-Eleven recently developed as the linchpin of its in-store feeding program.

The bar, a toppings station similar to those of Hardee's, Roy Rogers, and other quick-service chains, has been rolled into 200 7-Elevens to position the units as bona fide fast-food outlets rather than as retail stores selling finger foods as a sideline.

The units sell microwavable hamburgers, hot dogs, burritos, nachos, and sandwiches.

"We will not proceed further with the bars at this time because of the capital expenditures involved," the spokesman said.

It was not clear what effect, if any, the pending LBO will have on 7-Eleven's deli sandwich program. Late in 1986 the chain added a line of hot sandwiches, marketed under the name Get Hot, in 2,000 West Coast stores.

The array helped to bolster 7-Eleven's food-service sales to 8.1 percent of its total intake for 1986. Revenues totaled more than $8 billion.

The marketing value of The Works Condiments Bar emerged during recently discontinued tests of ventures with Hardee's and Church's Fried Chicken.

In those trials, which were halted months ahead of schedule, five 7-Elevens were outfitted with either a scaled-down Hardee's or Church's fast-food outlet.

Another 7-Eleven concurrently tested an in-store sandwiches-and-hot-dogs concept called The Works, which the retailer developed itself.

None of the three ventures met 7-Eleven's expectations, the spokesman said. He noted that the decisions to halt tests with Hardee's and Church's were made mutually with those parties.

"Putting burgers and biscuits into 7-Elevens with equipment didn't give 7-Eleven as good a payback as other alternatives," commented Jack Laughery, chairman of Imasco USA, the parent of the Hardee's hamburger chain.

According to the chain's spokesman, The Works test site in a store in Virginia has been closed.

He stressed that any trial arrangement with Dunkin' Donuts, a Randolph, Mass.-based doughnut-and-sandwich chain, would be much different from the Hardee's and Church's tests.

"That's more of a 'sell-through' program," said the spokesman, explaining that the doughnuts would be merely sold, not baked, in the 7-Eleven test sites.

Unlike Hardee's branded products, the doughnuts complement rather than compete with 7-Eleven's microwavable offerings, which include hamburgers, hot dogs, sandwiches, and such Mexican finger foods as nachos and burritos.

The spokesman declined to say how many 7-Elevens are currently selling doughnuts supplied by the La Mirada, Calif.-based Winchell's chain.

The Works Condiments Bar features 12 to 15 fresh toppings, which vary regionally.

"It could have jalapeños or whatever's popular in that area," the spokesman said.

The former The Works test unit in Virginia.

Minneapolis fare gets fancier

(Continued from page 1)
Italian restaurants in larger cities.

Seeing the market as an outsider, Stephen Pyles, who has gained national recognition for his creative Southwestern cuisine, said he expects initial resistance to Goodfellow's and Tejas, which are modeled after Routh Street and Baby Routh, respectively.

Pyles' partner, John Dayton, a Minneapolis native who hails from the Dayton's department store family and whose brother developed the luxury retail complex that houses the new $2.5 million restaurants, views his birthplace as "a sophisticated town, culturally and socially."

"The public still looks at Minneapolis as a cow town, but for its size, I think it's more sophisticated than any other city in the country," according to D'Amico, who has watched its sophistication level evolve since he moved here 11 years ago from Cleveland.

The city's culinary habits have long since expanded beyond steak and potatoes, D'Amico said, as witnessed by the many varied restaurants that have opened within the past decade. The D'Amico brothers also operate locally acclaimed Primavera.

Now that the market has experienced a plethora of cuisines, mainly in mom-and-pop ethnic restaurants, he believes it is ready for a higher standard of serious cooking.

Many of his customers already know quite a bit about wine, he pointed out, a fact that is attested to by the amount he sells from his all-Italian list. Sales average a bottle per table.

Pyles, though, is concerned about competing in a market accustomed to the very casual cafes that proliferate here. While such restaurants do not share the fine-dining scale of Goodfellow's, he believes they have set a style that the market likes and expects.

Goodfellow's customers so far are spending an average of $15 for lunch and $38 for dinner. While those prices are at the upper end in Minneapolis, where its regional magazine ranks restaurant meals that cost more than $20 without liquor, tax, and tip as very expensive, they are lower than Pyles expected. Dinner check averages at Routh Street are $76.

Larry D'Amico, the chef partner of D'Amico Cucina, shares Pyles' standards.

Richard D'Amico described a recent customer who was not familiar with this type of Italian restaurant. "Someone complained there wasn't spaghetti and meatballs on the menu. He also complained it was too expensive [his check was $19 for two], and then he asked if we would validate his parking."

Most restaurateurs are "terrorized to charge over $20 for an entrée," D'Amico said, even though a significant part of the market can afford to pay such prices. "They are willing to spend more when they're out of town," he noted.

His check averages are running $16 for lunch and $34 for dinner. D'Amico said he fears some customers may compare his restaurant with other local Italian ones that serve simpler fare and conclude his prices are too high.

Now that the market has experienced a plethora of cuisines, mainly in mom-and-pop ethnic restaurants, D'Amico believes Minneapolis is ready for a higher standard of serious cooking.

Sue Zelickson, local restaurant consultant and food writer, agreed with D'Amico's assessment of the market and noted that other fine-dining restaurants in town had failed to win acceptance because of their higher prices. "Hopefully, that will change as people realize you have to pay more for good food," she said.

While prices at Tejas ($8 to $10 for lunch and $12 to $15 for dinner) are more in line with market expectations, many menu items are not. "There are a lot of ingredients on this menu that most people have never heard of," Pyles said.

It's likely that local residents recognize some of the menu's language from their dining experiences in Mexican restaurants. But some of Pyles' ingredients and combinations may mystify them; for example, guajillo chile pancake with grilled rabbit and smoked corn cream or Southwestern chowder with shellfish and cascabel chile aioli.

Pyles has modified Goodfellow's Southwestern influence to include more familiar Midwestern ingredients. For example, the first entrée listing on a recent night was walleye pike with potato salad.

Initial reaction to Tejas and Goodfellow's has been "phenomenal," according to Dayton, who attributes part of the enthusiasm to curiosity about the glamorous retailing location in the posh Conservatory on Nicollet.

Opening business at D'Amico Cucina has been inconsistent, except for busy weekend nights, D'Amico said. Lunches, especially, have been off, perhaps because the restaurant is on the edge of the central business district.

The downtown locations of all three operations in a suburban-oriented market may hurt them, according to Peter Lilienthal, restaurant reviewer for Minneapolis-St. Paul magazine. "No new freestanding restaurants that I know of have opened downtown and made it," he said. "They all just sort of come and go."

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NRA releases 1988 forecast

(Continued from page 1)
the economic uncertainties, he added, "Of course, caution is necessary."

The NRA's forecast of real sales growth—the eighth consecutive yearly increase—nearly equals the government's projections of 2.8 percent overall growth in the Gross National Product and a 2.7-percent increase in real disposable personal income.

"This is good news for the restaurant industry," Grisanti said of the government's projections.

Economists link restaurant sales to changes in disposable personal income because dining out is a discretionary expense.

In addition, the unemployment rate is projected at 6 percent, its lowest level since 1979.

Other important factors in the NRA's optimistic view for 1988 include lower taxes for businesses and individuals and the promise of lower interest rates.

Restaurateurs and hoteliers could also take hope from the NRA's projection of a 4-percent increase in visits to the United States by foreigners, to 24 million. The trade group forecasts 4.5-percent real sales growth for hotel restaurants.

At the NRA's press conference, representatives of three major segments of the industry—fast-food, full-service, and contract feeding—discussed specific projections for their areas.

According to the NRA, fast feeders will outperform all other restaurants in sales growth except for those in hotels. The organization projected an 8.5-percent increase in fast-food sales, to more than $60 billion, for real growth of 4.3 percent.

Jim Peterson, vice president of the NRA and chief executive of Whataburger, said "changing consumer demographics and lifestyles" would fuel the rise in fast-food sales. He specifically mentioned consumers' growing desire for greater convenience and an increase in the number of children.

He also said chains could seize opportunities to boost sales at breakfast. "After several years of dramatic growth," he explained, "the breakfast market fell flat in 1986, posting a 1.9-percent decline in total customer count."

Mid- and upscale restaurants should ring up $70.6 billion in sales, for a real gain of 2.5 percent, said Grisanti, chief executive of an Italian dinner house chain that bears his name. Trends in that segment include greater interest in take-out, nutrition, and ethnic foods.

Many full-service restaurants have been hurt by the decline in liquor consumption brought on by health and safety concerns. But Grisanti stated the "decline in booze had bottomed out."

For the contract-feeding segment, the NRA projected a 7.2-percent increase in sales, to $11.5 billion, for real growth of 2.9 percent.

Bud Rusitzky, treasurer of the NRA and chief executive of the contract caterer Serv-Rite, said food service in commercial and office buildings would be one of the biggest gainers next year—a real growth of 4.8 percent—because of a burgeoning service economy.

Manufacturing and industrial accounts, however, would show slower growth—1.4 percent—than the average, he said, because of declines in blue-collar industries.

Schools and colleges that operate their own food service are likely to suffer negative real sales growth because of declines in the student population. But outside contractors in educational facilities should enjoy real sales gains, Rusitzky said, because of better cost savings and "accelerated merchandising to students."

Labor costs for the entire food-service industry are expected to rise 4 percent in 1988, compared with an estimated 3.6-percent rise this year. Any hike in the federal minimum wage would probably not affect sales in 1988.

Weak dollar to boost foreign tourism in '88

By Paul Frumkin

NEW YORK — Aided by a slipping dollar, foreign tourism in this country climbed sharply in 1987 and is expected to continue to grow throughout 1988, according to the U.S. Travel and Tourism Administration.

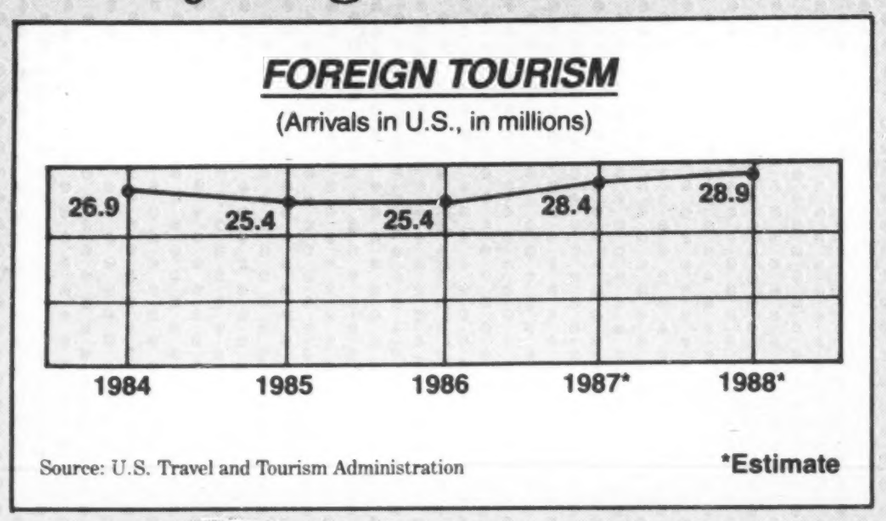
Don Wynegar, director of the Office of Research for the Department of Commerce, said a weakened U.S. dollar drove 1987 foreign arrivals up to an estimated 28.4 billion, an increase of 12 percent over last year's figure.

Expenditures were up 19 percent in 1987, to $19 billion, he said at a press conference staged in conjunction with the International Hotel/ Motel & Restaurant Show here.

Wynegar said further weakening of the dollar, caused largely by the recent market crash, should continue to boost foreign tourism in 1988 to 29 billion, up 2 percent over the amount in 1987.

He also cited other factors that could contribute to an increase, including the potential deregulation of European air carriers, low-cost trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific air fares, and increased U.S. promotion abroad.

At the same time, Wynegar noted that the weakened dollar didn't keep Americans at home this year. The number of U.S. citizens traveling abroad increased 8 percent in 1987, to an estimated total of 40.5 million.



Max takes Florida by storm

(Continued from page 1)
fruits, vegetables, and herbs.

Though popular now, the Southern California-style menu at Cafe Max was not an instant hit when the restaurant opened in 1984. Floridians "had no idea" at first what kind of food was being served, Max recalled.

"Only people who traveled a lot knew of this kind of approach," said the former Victoria Station regional manager and co-founder of the Raffles Bar & Grill chain. Cafe Max was one of the first places in Florida to offer mesquite grilling, wine by the glass, and light sauces, Max added.

Daily main-plate specials at the 100-seat Cafe Max, which grosses about $2 million annually serving only dinner, may include a roasted, Canadian-raised guinea fowl—known in France as *pintade*—and fish from local waters not usually found on restaurant menus: triggerfish, wahoo, amberjack, hog snapper, mangrove snapper, and mutton snapper.

Militello said he enjoys the quality and variety of Florida farm products raised and distributed by mom-and-pop entrepreneurs.

He buys fresh hearts of palm from an Indian reservation in Okeechobee, exotic fruits—including red bananas and rare varieties of mangoes and avocados—from a young couple in Homestead, Fla., and French mulberries, herbs, and baby red Swiss chard from another area farm. Farm-raised soft-shell crabs are available to him year-round.

The presence of immigrants from the Caribbean Islands and South America in Florida exerts a strong effect on the types of dishes served at Cafe Max and Max's Place, proprietor Max said. So does Max's and Militello's long-standing admiration for Alice Waters, Jeremiah Tower, and Wolfgang Puck—pioneering California chefs who helped define New American cuisine.

Militello prefers oak and seasoned wood for grilling. At Cafe Max grilled items include swordfish with sun-dried tomato vinaigrette; veal chop with mustard and thyme sauce; and wild-rice custard and chile-rubbed baby hen with corn, tomato, sweet pepper, and purple basil.

At both Cafe Max and the 100-seat, dinner-only Max's Place in North Miami, the menus reflect a wide range of influences.

Dishes at Max's Place include Southwestern chipotle-smoked salmon with yellow tomatoes, cilantro, and scallion sour cream; ravioli filled with grilled eggplant and goat cheese; pizzas cooked in a Tuscan oak-burning oven; grilled Gulf prawns with grilled vegetables and a fresh herb marinade; and crispy marinated roasted duck with ginger, honey, and Oriental vegetables.

Some dishes appear on the menus at both places, including many of the grilled fish items, which are served whole.

"Initially, people were taken aback by the whole fish, but it really caught on," the chef declared. Dennis Max said fresh fish served whole has become something of a signature dish at Cafe Max and Max's Place.

Maxaluna Tuscan Grill, Max's year-old Italian restaurant in Boca Raton, features food from Tuscany and Florence. The broad menu is divided into six sections—antipasti, pasta, risotto, salads, chicken and meat, and fish—with most main courses priced from $11.50 to $21.50.

Militello, who has Italian ancestors, said he has always wanted to do an Italian restaurant. "I usually found that Italian food in the United States was poorly done and misrepresented," he said.

Before Maxaluna opened, he traveled to Italy to research menu items. Among the offerings at the restaurant: oak-grilled baby hen with steamed escarole, pine nuts, raisins, chopped olives, and sun-dried tomatoes; spit-roasted leg of veal with a sauce of three wild mushrooms and two quails roasted with savoy cabbage, radicchio, golden raisins, pancetta, and port wine sauce.

Pasta for all three Max-owned restaurants is produced at Maxaluna on state-of-the-art pasta-making equipment—a special sheeter and a new pasta extruder, the latter equipped with a mechanism that forces cold water through the head so the pasta comes out cold and smooth. A common complaint about pasta extruders has been that they get hot during production and partially cook the dough, Militello explained.

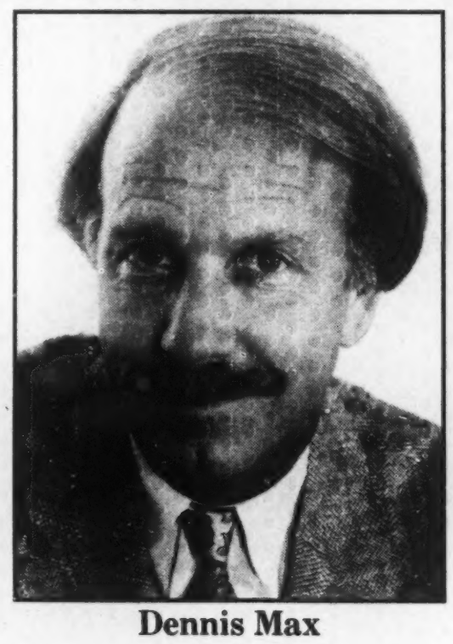
Maxaluna, Max's top-grossing restaurant—sales this year will exceed $3 million—has earned widespread praise for Max and Militello. The place was included in Esquire magazine's annual list of the 50 best new bars and restaurants in the United States. The Miami Herald said Max and Militello are emerging as "premier South Florida restaurateurs" with their "remarkable, daring, fresh approaches."

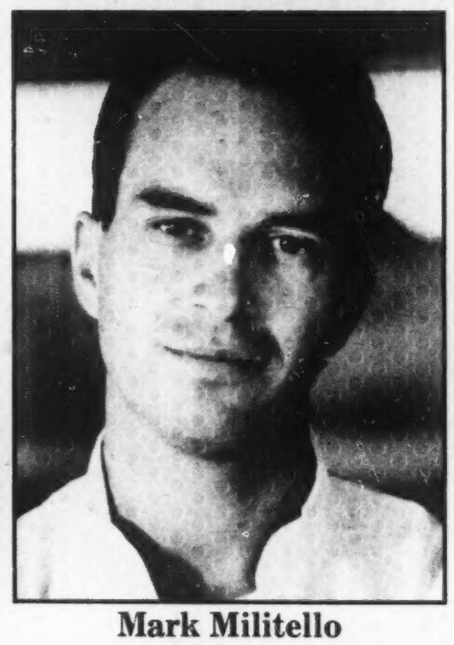
Militello, who was raised in Amherst, N.Y., and received a degree at Florida International University's School of Hotel and Restaurant Management, is building a nationwide reputation. He participated earlier this year in a prestigious California seminar called "Rising Stars and Great Chefs in America" and was the first non-California chef to prepare the Phelps Winery Dinner.

The chef said he tries to spend a week at a time at each restaurant in his capacity as Max's executive chef. Oliver Saucy is the on-premises chef at Cafe Max, Elliot King heads the kitchen at Max's Place, and Charles Saunders is chef at Maxaluna.

Max and Militello met in Florida, but Max was raised and educated in Southern California. He was a banker and stock broker before joining the old Victoria Station chain in 1973, and he rose to Southeastern regional manager in charge of about two dozen restaurants. He co-founded Creative Restaurants in 1979 and launched the Raffles Bar & Grill chain in Florida, eventually selling it.

The partners said they have in the works a fourth venture that will open next August.


Dennis Max


Mark Militello

Florida's immigrants exert a strong effect on the types of dishes served at Cafe Max and Max's Place.

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